

## **Speech & Language Support for Social Communication in the Early Years for West Berkshire**

**Rationale:** there is a long wait for Children and Young people to be seen for an Autism assessment and increasing waits to access a Speech & Language Therapist. Many children on the Speech & Language Therapy caseload have social communication difficulties and the most effective strategies are those carried out every day by those closest to the child. The communication environment that a child is in makes a big impact on their social communication development. It is therefore important that families and staff in EY settings are confident in how to support their children, knowing what strategies they can use and when/who to ask for help.

ECAT (Every Child a Talker) is an initiative funded by the Early Years Service in West Berkshire. The project funds 2 consultants a Speech & Language Therapist (0.1wte) and Early Years Teacher. ECAT focuses on encouraging the communication skills of young children through work with pre-school settings. The whole team working in the setting is involved in supporting ECAT and they have a lead practitioner (known as an ELLP) who attends termly cluster meetings. ECAT is currently bought in by individual settings. Each setting involved in the initiative has three areas that they focus on:

1. Identifying and supporting children who may be 'at risk of delay';
2. Developing the knowledge and skills of all of the practitioners who work within the setting;
3. Helping parents to understand the stages of development of speech and language skills and how they can encourage their child's development.

Although ECAT is a great and important provision it does not have capacity to specialise in social communication issues.

### **Proposal:**

- Use the budget being offered to boost and build on the existing work from ECAT with the distinction of this project being aimed at supporting specifically the area of social communication.
- Fund 0.2wte SLT and 0.1-2 wte EY practitioner to develop then deliver training and support with the following outcomes:
  1. Children and their families will report they are well supported and understand their child's social communication development.
  2. Adults supporting children with social communication difficulties feel confident about the support they can give and know when and where to seek help.

These 2 outcomes would mean that children and their families and the adults that support them would be enabled to manage the communication difficulties within the child's daily life ensuring they have their needs met and are included as far as is possible.

These outcomes have not yet been co-produced and may need to be developed further with those involved with the project as it starts.

### **Speech & Language Therapy Provision:**

Aims of the Provision: Children in West Berkshire will be supported by a Speech and Language Therapist who can support families and settings to meet their social communication needs through:

1. Delivering joint training sessions for EY settings (including childminders)
2. Delivering joint training sessions for families

3. Providing coaching sessions after the training for families and setting staff
4. Creating virtual support for developing social communication

**Recommended provision:**

0.2 wte (1 day) band 6 (specialist) SLT

**0.2 wte Band 6 SLT on a 52 week term basis: £18200**

**Possible outline of provision:**

**Staff in settings/childminders:**

Will be offered an initial training session on social communication (in the context of other language skills and language development) and then further follow up sessions to cover strategies that can be implemented. Specific coaching for the attendees to help them to implement appropriate strategies which will support social language and communication.

**Families:**

Will be offered training session on social communication (in the context of other language skills and language development) and then follow up sessions offered to cover strategies that can be implemented at home. Specific coaching for the attendees to help them to implement appropriate strategies which will support social language and communication.

The details of how many sessions of training over the year and where and how they are delivered would need to be scoped by the therapist who runs the project (alongside the offer from ECAT).

The training sessions could be a mix of workshop vs presentation style and could be virtual vs face to face. It may be within the scope of the project to produce some videos to help support families who have children with social communication difficulties.

Liaison with Autism Berkshire is recommended to see where there is opportunity for co-production.

Training in the specific interventions of Attention Autism and Intensive Interaction may be additional training that can be bought in by accredited trainers and offered to Early Years Settings across West Berkshire.